UNITED NATIONS

World Chronicle

PROGRAMME: No. 608, recorded 9 November 1995

GUEST: **Prof. Diogo FREITAS do AMARAL**
President, Fiftieth Session
United Nations General Assembly

JOURNALISTS: Rob Watson, BBC
Ricardo Alday, Mexican News Agency

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Professor Diogo FREITAS do AMARAL, President of the Fiftieth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, elaborates on the work of the General Assembly and efforts to reform the world organization. World leaders attending the fiftieth anniversary celebrations reaffirmed their commitment to the United Nations and, at the same time, agreed that reforms are necessary to reinvigorate the international body. Professor Freitas do Amaral coordinates the work of five major working groups charged with developing a blueprint for these reforms. He also agrees that the Security Council should be enlarged to provide more equitable representation.

WORLD CHRONICLE is produced by the Media Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.

Duration: 28:02"
Executive Producer: Kamil Taha
Director: Livingston Hinckley
Production Assistant: Ellen McGuffie

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

In September of every year, the General Assembly of the United Nations convenes its regular session. World leaders converge on United Nations headquarters in New York to state their countries' positions on national, regional and international issues. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. More than 150 heads of State or Government attended a special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly.

Our guest today is Professor Diogo Freitas do Amaral, President of the fiftieth session of United Nations General Assembly. Joining me to talk with Professor Freitas do Amaral are Rob Watson of the BBC and Ricardo Alday of the Mexican News Agency.

Professor Freitas do Amaral, welcome to World Chronicle.

FREITAS do AMARAL: Thank you very much.

LITTLEJOHNS: As this is your first appearance on this programme, Mr. President, I guess it's not too late to congratulate you on your election to that very high office.

FREITAS do AMARAL: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Are you enjoying it? And how do you think the General Assembly is doing so far?

FREITAS do AMARAL: Well, I'm enjoying it very much. Of course, it is a great honour to be President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, especially in this very important year of the fiftieth anniversary. It was quite an occasion to be presiding over a meeting of 185 heads of State and Government on the 22nd, 23rd and 24th of October, commemorating the 50 first years of the United Nations. I think things are going well, and that special commemoration showed, in my opinion, that there is a universal commitment of all countries to support and to preserve the United Nations. They want the United Nations to go on — of course, with some reforms, with some changes, but they said, very clearly, there is no alternative to the United Nations. And this I think is the right decision to take about the international organization.

LITTLEJOHNS: Now that the captains and kings, so to speak, have departed, what is the main business of the General Assembly that has still to be addressed? What do you consider to be one or two or three main items that you expect or hope to make progress on?

FREITAS do AMARAL: Well, we are now facing ordinary business, many things for discussion on very different aspects. What I really think will be the next important moment will be the work of five different working groups from January to July in order to try to conclude a blueprint for reform of the United Nations. Reform of the United Nations is the

word of the day. Everybody wants to keep the United Nations, as I said, to preserve it, but also to reform it. And everybody thinks that the right time is now. So, we have been given a mandate by the General Assembly itself to conclude a blueprint for reform until the end of this fiftieth session, which means July or September '96. And I am presiding over four of those five working groups, and they are the working group on the Agenda for Peace; the working group on the Agenda for Development; the working group on the reform of the Security Council; the working group on the financial situation of the UN; and the working group on the strengthening and revitalizing of the UN. So, I am coordinating these five working groups and chairing four of them, with the exception of the Agenda for Peace, which is chaired by the Egyptian Ambassador, and I will try to coordinate the work of these five working groups so that in fact we face the different tasks of these five working groups as one global task — reform of the United Nations.

WATSON: One of the things I'd like to pick up on, you pointed out that the heads of Government, heads of States, princes, kings, et cetera, who came here said that there was no alternative to the United Nations. But it was also interesting that some UN officials, some diplomats told me that, in a sense, the fiftieth anniversary was a missed opportunity, and that the resolution that came out at the end to celebrate the UN was rather weak, that it just said, yes, we ought to recommit ourselves to the UN, to the idea of reform — financial, of the Security Council — but that there wasn't really any meat in it and that it was a missed opportunity. Do you agree with that?

FREITAS do AMARAL: I don't agree entirely. Of course, the resolution could be a little bit shorter, and perhaps more visionary, but the fact is that it was decided that the resolution should be prepared and adopted by consensus, and consensus meant, in that particular context, unanimity. And, of course, if a text is written and drafted by 185 countries, it can't be like the Declaration of Independence of the United States or the Rights of Man of the French Revolution. Of course, it's difficult. But the main point to me is that we shouldn't look at that meeting as a meeting for discussing items or for reaching decisions on practical matters. It was meant to show whether there was commitment or not to preserving and reforming the United Nations.

WATSON: But presumably, though, it would have been easier —

FREITAS do AMARAL: And there was, there was.

WATSON: Well, sure, but —

FREITAS do AMARAL: A general commitment.

WATSON: But presumably it would have been easier when you had the heads of State here — if the groundwork had been done before — while they were here to actually say, right, rather than letting all these things get bogged down in endless committees like

they always have been in the past, let's agree on this: This is what we're going to do about the Security Council; the United States should pay its debts; this is how we're going to restructure the financing. And in that sense it was an opportunity missed.

FREITAS do AMARAL: Well, you know, of course it would have been wonderful if it was possible, but the fact is that the working groups preparing the reform of the Security Council, the financial situation, et cetera, have not yet finished their work. We don't know if they will finish this year. I hope they will, but we don't know exactly. So the work was not done for the heads of State and Government to decide to adopt a concrete decision on those very difficult issues.

And so — but there was a doubt. You know, after the end of the cold war, after the end of the bipolar world and nuclear confrontation between the western world and the Soviet Union and its allies, a big question was opened: What will the new international order be? Will it be based on the United Nations, although reformed and modernized? Will it be an entirely different order with an entirely different international organization? Nobody knew. Nobody ever answered that, since 1989, until 1995. And so this meeting was the occasion that the heads of State and heads of Government of the whole world had to state if they thought the new international order needed a new international organization. As it happened, at the end of the First World War, the League of Nations was created; after the Second World War the League of Nations was extinguished and the United Nations Organization was created. What was the intention of the Governments of the world? To create a new organization, or to keep this one and reform it? And they came here to New York to say "We want to preserve the United Nations, although we also want to reform it."

WATSON: But don't you think the message was also, quite sensibly perhaps, the selfish foreign policy goals that countries pursue, that there was a — I mean, I got the impression that they were saying, "Well, we'll use the United Nations when it's useful to us, and we won't when it isn't."

FREITAS do AMARAL: Well, of course the United Nations is not and will not be in the near future the world government. So it is an inter-governmental organization. The United Nations does and is what the Governments of the nation-states want it to do and to be. So, in a way, of course, that is true: the United Nations will only do what national Governments will the United Nations to do. But it was important to know if they wanted the United Nations or another organization. They said, "We want the United Nations." It was important to know if they thought reform of the United Nations was to be done now or in some distant future. After all, the theme of United Nations reform is a very recent theme, it has two or three years. And they all came, and practically all of them said, "We want reform, and the time for reform is now." And some of them went even further and

said the main objectives of reform must be these and these, and they said what they thought about it. So in a way, I think that these different working groups I was talking about before, which are mandated by the General Assembly to study and propose a reform of the United Nations, they had their first meeting in those three days of October. It was the first meeting of the reform process. We got the message from the heads of State and the heads of Government at the highest level: We think reform must be done, and it must be this and that.

Of course, there are different concepts of reform. I heard very carefully all the speeches. There is not yet a complete agreement on what reform should be. Some countries say reform is to put the United Nations a little less expensive with less payments and expenditures, budget reductions, et cetera; some others say, no, the main purpose is to reinforce the role of the United Nations in peace-keeping; others say, no, the main reform should be to reinvest and give more means to help the development of the third world countries. So there are different approaches, which is natural and is positive. I think that reform of the United Nations will not be and cannot be the adoption of one of these concepts and the exclusion of the others; it should be a creative synthesis of the three or four different approaches that have been presented.

ALDAY: But, Mr. President, the fact that Member States can't even agree to a formal time-frame for reform, doesn't it put it on a distant future, as you were earlier saying?

FREITAS do AMARAL: I think it has been agreed and decided unanimously by the General Assembly that the blueprint for reform, the main lines, general lines of reform, should be presented by these working groups by the end of the fiftieth session, which means July or September '96. This is a time limit, and we will try to keep it.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Professor Diogo Freitas do Amaral, President of the fiftieth session of the United Nations General Assembly. Ricardo?

ALDAY: Yes, but in concrete terms, the fact that — I mean, going out of the UN language and the UN time-frames and UN references, can you explain to us what happens after this blueprint is done?

FREITAS do AMARAL: Well, it has not yet been decided, but I can give you my personal opinion. As I see it, we have six, seven months from January to July to agree on the main lines of reform and to approve, say, a document of about 25, 30 pages — I don't think we should make a document of 300 pages! — with the main guidelines for reform, reform of the General Assembly, reform of the Security Council, reform of the international tribunals, reform of the Secretariat, reform of the Economic and Social Council, agencies, UN system, et cetera. Main guidelines. Then, and I would personally be very happy if I

could, in the last session, in the last meeting of this session, by mid-September '96, if I could be able to present to the General Assembly as Chairman of those working groups the blueprint for reform. Then the fifty-first session, beginning in September '96, would have the task of drafting the texts, the legal texts, which would materialize that reform — the revision of the Charter, resolutions, treaties, whatever.

WATSON: Can I come in on a specific issue there? One of the themes mentioned by most western leaders and most notably by President Clinton was that the United Nations was a hopeless bureaucracy with too many agencies and that the number one priority should be taking the pruning shears to the UN. Do you think that the General Assembly will be willing to do that, to perhaps cut some of these agencies, and maybe in return the Western Powers would look more favourably upon the expansion of the Security Council?

FREITAS do AMARAL: Well, of course, reform of the United Nations must be a package, in which there are different contributions. I agree that there are some duplications and some overlapping, and perhaps too many agencies and bodies and organs and commissions.

WATSON: Could you name some of them?

FREITAS do AMARAL: I'm not yet prepared to do so, but having looked at the complete list of organs, agencies, services, departments, et cetera, I got the impression that we have too much, and this is really very difficult to manage. So, I personally would be in favour of a reduction of the number, provided that this reduction is not only made with the purpose of cutting expenditure, but with the main objective of doing more efficient work, and therefore it needs not only in some regards cutting expenditure, but in others improving or augmenting expenditure. We need to reinvest in the main tasks of the United Nations.

WATSON: But there is going to be some nasty politics, isn't there? Because which country, for example, would like to see a UN agency or operation removed from its soil, therefore removing hard, needed currency, jobs, things like that?

FREITAS do AMARAL: Well, I think that those countries who are directly concerned should not be able to veto a reform. If it concerns themselves, they are interested parties and they should not even vote on that particular point, if we were to apply to international organizations the rules that prevail in national countries which are democracies and in which you can't decide over your own interests if you hold a public job.

So we have to arrive at a package. If we can convince the great majority of the countries that some reforms are needed, and if there is a broad consensus on that, I think that the country which is particularly concerned with being the headquarters or the host country to this or that agency will feel isolated to protest or to say no. But of course, this raises a new problem: Can we reform the United Nations applying the rule of consensus?

If consensus is considered unanimity in decisions, I don't think so. I think we should go for two-thirds majority decisions, not for unanimous decisions.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. President, we hear a great deal about the need to reform the Security Council, expand the Security Council, perhaps have some new permanent members of the Security Council with or without the power of the veto. Do you have any particular ideas on how this might be achieved? Because obviously there's a great deal of disagreement about how to go about it. Germany and Japan have been proposed for permanent seats, but other countries — Mexico, for example, in Latin America, Brazil, also in Latin America, Nigeria, Egypt, India, Indonesia — have all been clamouring for permanent seats also. How are you going to resolve problems like that?

FREITAS do AMARAL: Well, I must confess that the problem of the reform of the Security Council and its enlargement is probably the most difficult problem to solve, perhaps even more difficult than the financial crisis. How should we face that problem? Until now, that problem has been faced as one single problem: enlargement, meaning the creation of new permanent members and new non-permanent members, and mixing with that also discussing which countries should be the new permanent members, et cetera. I think that if we go on along that line, we will never find a solution for the problem of the Security Council, because there will always be clashing national interests and claims. If everybody agrees — and I think that in the three-day commemorative meeting it was clear that everybody now agrees that there should be an enlargement of the Security Council and that there should be equitable representation of the countries of the world, and therefore new members coming not only from the North but also from the South — if we agree on that, I think that we should separate two very different questions: First, how many new members should the Security Council have? How many permanent, how many non-permanent? And what main criteria, in general terms, should be adopted for the selection of those members? This is one question. And that question could be solved in 1996 within the working group on the reform of the Security Council without any consideration of concrete countries. Second question, which I think is very different and should be faced only after the first is solved: Which countries to appoint to the new seats? That, in my opinion, should be solved by election with a secret vote. Once we know that, for instance, we will have two or three new — or five — new permanent members, then an election should be opened, candidacies should be presented by those countries interested, and there should be an election through secret vote, and those who have more votes should be chosen for the place. But never, in my opinion, should we mix the two questions, because if we mix the two questions, we will never get to a decision, to a solution.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. President, there are 15 members of the Security Council now; the United States has said that the increase should not make the membership more than about 20, perhaps 22, whatever. If you're going to have 5 new permanent members, that doesn't give anybody else much of a chance.

FREITAS do AMARAL: Well, perhaps we could — well, this is a matter for negotiation. But theoretically speaking, perhaps we could have 4 or 5 new permanent members and 4 or 5 new non-permanent members, which would give us 8 or 10 new seats, which would make the new Security Council a body of 22 or 23 or 24 members. I think that the limit will be probably around 25, no more than 25, between 20 and 25.

ALDAY: But wouldn't that create another mini-General Assembly, thus reducing the importance of the General Assembly itself?

FREITAS do AMARAL: Well, I don't think so. You see, the General Assembly has gone in 50 years from 51 members to 185. The Security Council could well have 20 or 25 members. There are many national Governments around the world with 25 ministers, and they are executive bodies, they are not parliaments. So I think that if we don't go more than 25 members it's workable and can be efficient.

WATSON: If I could sort of change the tone slightly, I think one of the impressions that people around the world get from watching the proceedings of the United Nations, and perhaps at the three days of celebrations with lots of rather earnest heads of State and with dry diplomats, I wondered whether, from your privileged vantage point, being the General Assembly President, whether anything funny had happened, whether you had any revealing anecdotes that you could lay before us.

FREITAS do AMARAL: Well, I have many, in fact. Some of them perhaps I should not reveal while I am still the President of the General Assembly. But there is perhaps one that I can already tell. During the first day of the meeting, by the middle of the morning, at about eleven o'clock, we received — on the podium, the Secretary-General and I — we received a message from the Security Services that there was a parachutist coming down from an airplane trying to enter one of the windows of the United Nations, and nobody knew at that time if it was to put a bomb or if it was for some other purpose. Of course we got a little bit worried, but immediately afterwards, five minutes later, we got the message through a small telephone that exists at the table of the presidency that the helicopters of New York police had already been able to oblige the parachutist to go off the United Nations building to a small island in the East River. Well, we got a little bit less anxious, but we did not know whether it was a bomb or not. Ten minutes later, we were informed that the window at which the parachutist was trying to enter the building was the window of my office, the office of the President of the General Assembly. And the Secretary-General

said, "Well, I'm very much concerned. Could this be a menace to you?" And I said to him, very, very low of course, because the meeting was going on, "No, I don't think so, because I'm not famous enough to have the honour of being bombed." Another five minutes and we knew it was a Greenpeace member delivering a message of peace.

LITTLEJOHNS: Professor Freitas do Amaral, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been Professor Diogo Freitas do Amaral, President of the fiftieth session of the United Nations General Assembly. He was interviewed by Rob Watson of the BBC and Ricardo Alday of the Mexican News Agency. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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